

music at convocation hall

Jacques Després, piano

Friday, January 10, 2003

7:15 pm *Pre-Concert Introduction*
by **Malcolm Forsyth**
Main floor, Convocation Hall

8:00 pm *Concert*



Arts Building
University of Alberta



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Program

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|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Ballade (1978) | Jacques Hétu (b. 1938) |
| Ballade (1890) | Claude Debussy (1862-1918) |
| Balladen, Op. 10 (1854) | Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) |
| Andante | |
| Andante | |
| Intermezzo-Allegro | |
| Andante con moto | |

Intermission

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|---|-----------------|
| Ballade No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 23 (1831-35) | Frédéric Chopin |
| Ballade No. 2 in F Major, Op. 38 (1836-39) | (1810-1849) |
| Ballade No. 3 in A-Flat Major, Op. 47 (1840-41) | |
| Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52 (1841-42) | |

Program Notes

In 12th century Provence, the term ballade referred to a folk-style dance form. From the next century on, the dance element disappeared and the ballade evolved into two different and distinct artistic genres: literary and musical.

In literature, the ballade was transmitted, through the centuries, orally and in written form. In poetry, it became a sophisticated and precise literary genre with writers such as Villon, Dante, and Petrarch. From 18th century England, ballades that through the century had been orally transmitted started to systematically be collected by writers, such as Percy and Sir Walter Scott, who also added to the genre by writing their own. The subjects of these folk-like ballades were, to name a few, history, legend, myth, epic and obviously love. Orally transmitted folk ballades were also a source of material for German Romanticists, beginning with Goethe, who collected some folk ballades and also wrote some of his own. The style of the German ballades was narrative in nature and “involving epic, legendary, fantastic or fairy tale themes.” This use of the ballade reached Poland in the beginning of the 19th century. Apparently, the best writer of this genre in Poland was Mickiewicz.

The musical history of the ballade is characterized by the different forms and shapes it took. From the middle Ages, with the trouvères and troubadours, the ballade was a song with musical accompaniment. It developed in France into a polyphonic work used by composers such as Dufay and de Machaut. In Italy in the 15th century, it took the shape of a two-part choral work. With the birth of the so-called Romantic Movement, a new type of lied appeared in Germany: the ballade. It apparently was influenced by the popular English and Scottish musical ballades. This German tradition of ballade writing started with Zumsteeg, Loewe and went on to Schubert, Schumann and Brahms.

This leads us to Chopin whose four ballades will fill the second half of the recital. Chopin was the first composer to write purely instrumental ballades. Even if the medium for this language is the piano alone, through Chopin’s hand, one can feel a direct connection encompassing the long ballade tradition. In Chopin’s ballades, there is a clear dance element, and his narrative and lyrical style appears to combine in mood and character the many themes of the traditional ballade. Most importantly, although there are some structural similarities between the ballades, Chopin’s ballades are defined more by their content and poetic qualities than their organizational design.

This trend, of greater independence and poetic freedom, does fit the artistic and musical inclination of early 19th century composers, especially when writing for piano. Larger musical forms of the classical style were more or less, as Arnold Hauser described in The Social History of Art, replaced by “less severe and schematically molded forms,” such as Fantasies, Rhapsodies, Arabesques, Etudes, and Intermezzi. With Chopin, Liszt and Schumann, for example, a larger work could be a series of shorter pieces, most often descriptive and evocative in their content, united under a title. Hauser compared this practice to that of the sketch-book of a painter. This practice, to a certain extent, replaced forms such as the sonata which is in itself a complete world, a “microcosm.” In these short pieces, composers were probably influenced by their literary counterparts who were primarily interested with poetic content rather than in having their thoughts fit a “form.” This is not to say that composers using larger and traditional forms were not interested

with artistic content in their work. But with romanticism, the "I," ego, impressions and feelings of the composers were becoming the dominant element to be communicated. Consequently, the manner in which it was communicated became as original and personal. In his ballades, Chopin is a particularly interesting storyteller. Although his compositional motivations were not, on the surface, of "nationalistic" nature, he certainly did not attempt to deny his Polish influences. This certainly can help explain how the more "Western" contemporary critics of Chopin saw in his music, "eccentricities full of earsplitting dissonances."

Although Chopin's ballades cannot be associated with a literary parallel, with the opening ballade of his opus 10, Brahms is the first composer to associate a literary work to a purely instrumental ballade. In this initial ballade, not only does Brahms give us the source of the literary material in his subtitle, ("after the Scottish ballad 'Edward' in Herder's *Stimmen der Völken*"), the opening musical phrase fits the words of the literary ballade rather closely. The last three ballades of this early collection by Brahms follow the pattern set by the first one: they are all in a three-part song form. In addition, Brahms' youthful voice shows a personal side, without inhibition, that is not easily found in his mature works. The tragic time in which these works were sketched was of great significance for this impressionable young composer. As in the 'Edward' ballade, in which a father is slain by his son, Brahms might have not escaped a certain parallel or symbolism as he somehow was about to replace his musical surrogate father, Robert Schumann, whose mind was ravaged by syphilis and whose body was never to leave an asylum.

Debussy's Ballade is a very early work. Its original title, "Ballade Slave," seems to allude more to a slight touch of exoticism than a truly Eastern idiom. Although Debussy was greatly influenced by Russian music in the early days of his musical life following a two-month stay in this then remote world, a listener cannot help but recognize a clear Gallic voice. This work is also of particular interest because it prefaces Debussy's greatest works. One of the compositional techniques that Debussy later rather disliked greatly is the almost literal repetition of phrases. Of course, this kind of repetition might be one of the connections to the literary ballade, but later in his life, Debussy did not view this as a sign of a sophisticated and creative mind. Nonetheless, this work is unmistakably Debussy and provides another display of the ballade genre.

Canadian composer Jacques Hétu unassumingly described his Ballade as "based on a brief cell of an ascending seventh and descending second." Interestingly, the spirit of the work belongs to the romantic tradition as epic, dramatic and lyrical sections are juxtaposed in a dense, extroverted and powerful work.

Upcoming Events (cont'd):

February

3 Monday, 12:10 pm

Music at Noon, Convocation Hall Student Recital Series featuring students from the Department of Music. Free admission

5, 6, 7, 8 Wed, Thurs, Fri, Sat, 8:00 pm

The University of Alberta *Opera*

Alan Ord, Director

Full Opera Performance of ***The Magic***

Flute by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

with the University Symphony Orchestra

Tanya Prochazka, Conductor

10 Monday, 8:00 pm

Music at Convocation Hall

William H Street, saxophone

Roger Admiral, piano

Works by Denisov, Fisher, Bashaw,

Lauba, Bauzin, Gallois-Montbrun and

Heider

14 Friday, 6:00 pm

The University of Alberta

Academy Strings Valentine's Ball

Tanya Prochazka, Conductor

University of Alberta Faculty Club

For tickets and event information, please

call 492-9410

23 Sunday, 9:30 am

Piano Masterclass with Visiting Artist

Angela Cheng

Free admission

24 Monday, 12:00 pm

Noon-Hour Organ Recital

The recital presents a variety of organ repertoire played by students, faculty and guests of the University of Alberta.

Free admission

28 Friday, 8:00 pm

Faculty & Friends

Marnie Giesbrecht, organ

Liszt *Prelude and Fugue on BACH*

Franck *Chorale in A Minor, Finale*

Reger *Introduction and Passaglia*

Reger *Beneficetus*,

Schumann *BACH sketches*

Admission: \$12/adult, \$7/student/senior



Please donate to Campus Food Bank

Unless otherwise indicated

Admission: \$5/student/senior, \$10/adult

Convocation Hall, Arts Building, University of Alberta

Please note: All concerts and events are subject to change without notice. Please call 492-0601 to confirm concerts (after office hours a recorded message will inform you of any changes to our schedule).



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